

The University of Chicago

THE POSITION
OF THE QUARTERLIES ON
SOME CLASSICAL DOGMAS

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF
THE HUMANITIES IN CANDIDACY FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

1938

BY

JOHN J. WELKER

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THE POSITION OF THE QUARTERLIES ON SOME CLASSICAL DOGMAS

By JOHN J. WELKER

Students of the Romantic Period often favor the quarterlies with their attention and commonly proceed upon certain assumptions with respect to the attitude of the reviews toward Romanticism. The almost unanimous impression seems to be that the reviews were throughout the period inimical to Romantic principles and to Romantic writers. While it is acknowledged that the attitude of the reviewers was mixed, their criticism is agreed to be, by and large, a heritage of the eighteenth century.

It is not easy to find outright statements of these views, as most comments on the quarterlies are rather vague, and the meaning is elusive. Professor Hugh Walker, however, speaks with welcome precision:

The lessons of the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Review* critics are more by way of warning than of example to us, while the critics of the other school are still rich in positive instruction. The difference is sometimes said to be that whereas the critics of the traditional school relied upon fixed rules and believed in permanent and unalterable canons, those of the romantic school denied the existence of any such canons. This difference is real, but it may easily be misinterpreted. The critics of the new, no more than those of the old, school denied the existence and the necessity of law in criticism; but the two conceptions of law were distinguished as the static from the dynamic, or the mechanical from the organic. It is true, Lamb was almost purely intuitive in his criticisms; and though he worked upon principles, he would have been puzzled to explain them. But Coleridge, as sensitive in intuition as Lamb, consciously followed the lines of German philosophical criticism, and imported into England the principles of Lessing and Schlegel. It was the introduction into literary criticism of that which we know in philosophy as Transcendentalism, in religion as Mysticism, in poetry as Romanticism. Only thus could the new literature be intelligently criticised. The absurd mistakes of the old school were due to the fact that their standards were utterly incongruous with that to which they were applied.¹

More recently, Professor Newman Ivey White has described the periodical reviewing in much the same terms. He sees "in the best critics of the age . . . a down-at-heels literary traditionalism inherited from eighteenth-century critical practice." And he adds,

¹ *The Literature of the Victorian Era* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1931), p. 939.

The quarterlies differed from the eighteenth-century reviewers more in quality than in fundamental principles. . . . The great majority of periodicals were simply eighteenth-century survivals or their imitators and continued a tradition very little changed except inasmuch as the fear of revolution intensified elements already existing.²

This view of the quarterlies is one of the most strongly established tenets in English literary history, and it is therefore confidently asserted on every hand that quarterly criticism is dead. We may assume, however, that its ghost has not been laid, since the historians find it so often necessary to stir its ashes. In view of the reluctant but persistent interest in it, I think that some of the results of an exhumation and a systematic examination of the remains may be of interest to the students of Romanticism.

I have confined my study of the reviews to the period from their beginnings to about 1825, when Gifford had ceased to have anything to do with the *Quarterly*. My principal purpose was to discover to what extent the most characteristic dogmas of eighteenth-century English Classical criticism were repeated in the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly Reviews*. The first question is whether the reviews accepted the Classical rules. The second is whether they recommended imitation of models. And the third is whether they approved of careful revision of one's writing. These three are not the only questions involved in a discussion of the general principles of the quarterlies; but at least, a precise answer to these is a step toward a sounder understanding of the reviews than the traditional one which prevails.

The Classical Rules

I shall take up first the attitude of the *Quarterly* and shall attempt to show that it consistently and vigorously opposed the imposition of the Classical code. No one at all familiar with the periodical criticism of the Romantic Period can doubt for a moment that the rules were a live issue. References to them are innumerable, and the only wonder is that students have failed to discover the *Quarterly's* distinct antagonism. There is nothing of importance on the subject in the first two volumes, a fact which we may attribute to the need for caution during the new periodical's probationary period. The *Quarterly* takes a conciliatory tone when

² *The Unextinguished Hearth, Shelley and His Contemporary Critics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1938), p. 11.

it opens the question: "Some of these rules are indeed so consonant to the injunctions which a cultivated taste would always impose, that no poem which appears to be constructed on different principles, will long engage the attention of a literary age."³ One can hardly miss the fact that while the reviewer does not condemn the rules categorically, he clearly reserves the right to pass judgment on each and to lay down his own code. A little later in the same number he expresses his respect for the ancient rules in painting.⁴ And finally, near the end of the volume, he openly challenges the authority of the rules, by defending the irregularity of *The Lady of the Lake* and contending that an author has the right to decide for himself whether or not he wants to obey the rules.⁵

In these passages the *Quarterly* strikes the keynote of its treatment of the rules. It remains unimpressed by their boasted authority, but it is still cautious and moderate. A little later it describes its course as a *via media*. The poets, it says, are inclined to pay too little attention to the principles of taste, and *most modern critics* have a too pedantic veneration for the ancients. Though it admits the need for rules, it contends that they are not to be found in "the mechanical jargon of French criticism" but to be drawn from a fresh study of the human heart.⁶ The glance at the *Edinburgh* here cannot be missed. It is quite evident that the *Quarterly* regards itself as the liberal and progressive opponent of its too conservative rival. The modern view, which regularly reverses their positions whenever it recognizes any distinction between the two reviews, would undoubtedly puzzle and astonish Gifford, Scott, and Southey. The demand for a thoroughgoing revision of the code, upon psychological principles, is especially significant too, I think.

In 1811 the *Quarterly's* position is again stated, and this time with such emphasis that the reviewer has evidently burned his bridges behind him and definitely assumed the offensive. He asserts that every author of commanding and original genius has

³ *Quarterly*, III, 380 f. My citations are so numerous that it is impractical to give the date of each volume referred to. From the dates of the founding of the *Quarterly* (1809) and of the *Edinburgh* (1802), however, the reader may easily estimate the date of any of the approximately semi-annual volumes cited.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 493, 515, 517. Cf. XXIII, 410.

⁶ *Ibid.*, V, 40-43.

novelties of subject, prosody, and style and likes to wander from the beaten path of authority. He continues,

For ourselves, we have not been among those . . . who 'shake the head, and whisper much, and change the countenance' at every little instance of departure from a classical model; who gravely admonish him to revert in good time to the old established trammels of poetry; and cry out against the heinous offence of delighting the world in an unusual way. It is enough for us, and it would, we believe, have been enough for Aristotle, that a narrative should have plot, and interest, and action and pathos; that it should be adorned with beautiful imagery, and told in unaffected language; and that the character of the emotions excited by its perusal should be animated, dignified and pure.⁷

I seriously question whether any more downright declaration of rebellion against the rules can be found in any of the authors admittedly Romantic. I question whether any of the recent writers who solemnly describe the *Quarterly* as "authoritarian" are aware of the existence of this passage. The attack thus begun continues through the succeeding volumes.⁸

It may be interesting to notice the charges which the *Quarterly* prefers against the rules. We find, in the first place, that it joins with Schlegel in denying the supposed classical authority of the code. It admits that some of the rules are to be found in Aristotle and Horace, but it insists that many of the most important are not embodied in the doctrines, or justified by the practice, of any classical author.⁹ This assertion places the responsibility for the code as a whole upon the moderns, from Vida and Castelvetro on, and eliminates one of the strongest arguments in favor of the Classical system. Even insofar as ancient practice accords with the rules, the *Quarterly* denies them authority, because ancient civilization and literature were too little advanced to afford modern authors much valuable instruction or to merit a servile and superstitious reverence.¹⁰

Not only does the *Quarterly* deny that the ancients can be cited

⁷ *Quarterly*, VI, 222 f.

⁸ *Ibid.*, VII, 393; XIII, 83; XVII, 258; XXIV, 82; XXVII, 478.

⁹ *Ibid.*, XII, 115; XXV, 174; XXVII, 481-85.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, XXIX, 29-31, 425. This conception of necessary progress, both in civilization and in literature, which gives the *Quarterly's* criticism a definite tincture of perfectionism, is one of its most interesting—and least suspected—features.

in support of the rules; it asserts that little sanction for them can be found among the moderns. It charges that the practice of attending to the rules is peculiar to the French and to a small number of other writers who have sporadically imitated the French. The *Quarterly* points out that the Spanish, the German, and the Elizabethan English writers have always for the most part disregarded the code, and it gives a continuous history of irregularity in England from before the civil wars even through the Restoration and the early eighteenth century.¹¹ It twits the French themselves for having broken the very laws which they pique themselves on following. They have dropped the chorus, replaced singing and recitative with declamation, exchanged the mask and the cothurnus for rouge and kid slippers, and introduced an underplot, in plain violation of Aristotle's unity of action, the only one of the unities on which he is clear and unequivocal.¹²

Another argument urged against the rules is that no permanent and universal standard can be imposed upon an art which is always in a state of flux and which must vary from country to country. The attempt to force all literatures into one mold is bound to fail or to be disastrous wherever it succeeds.¹³

The main objection to the rules is the effect which they have upon literature. The elegantly medioc're are not hampered by the critical regulations which they follow; but genius, imagination, and inspiration cannot be confined to rules. The French are charged with trying to impose rules, which they can obey without inconvenience, in order to impede greater geniuses enough to enable the French to keep up with them.¹⁴ Subjection to the rules is blamed for the decline of English and Spanish drama.¹⁵ Other charges lodged are that adherence to the rules precludes many beauties;¹⁶ so narrows down the subject material that suitable resources must eventually be exhausted;¹⁷ diminishes the interest of a work;¹⁸

¹¹ *Quarterly*, XXV, 1 f., 174; XXVII, 478-85; XXIX, 425.

¹² *Ibid.*, XXVII, 482, 484.

¹³ *Ibid.*, IX, 111, 160; XII, 115, 133; XXIII, 410; XXVII, 483; XXIX, 29-31, 427.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, XII, 115, 133, 144; XIII, 86 f.; XVII, 448; XXV, 174; XXIX, 32; XXXIV, 429 f.; XXXV, 199.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, XVII, 254; XXIX, 421-26.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, XXVII, 479 f.; XXIX, 421.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, IX, 111.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, V, 42; XII, 128; XVII, 258; XXIII, 432.

stifles passion and deprives the work of power to stir the emotions;¹⁹ and makes the imitation of nature less close, substituting an artificial, unreal world.²⁰

Before leaving the *Quarterly*, we may pause to consider its remarks which specifically concern the unities. Some of the arguments are the same as those used against the rules as a whole. It says that the unities "were violated by the Greeks as often as the circumstances of an open theatre would allow" and also by modern French dramatists; and it argues that the changes which have taken place in the form of the theatre since ancient times have made it absurd to continue observing the unities of time and place.²¹ To do so only encumbers the writer, without any corresponding addition to the pleasure of the spectator.²² One of the strong arguments for the unities—that attention to them diminishes the improbability of the representation—is answered by the contention that, on the contrary, it is an outstanding source of downright absurdities. The *Quarterly* lists many of these, referring to specific plays, and ridicules the practice of setting all sorts of action in some one locality, because of a superstition about change of scene, and of crowding a multitude of events into a few hours, because of a prejudice against lapses of time. "The tragedian has, at most, but a choice of difficulties; and . . . the tragedians of the British and German and Spanish schools have chosen, after all, [by preferring the irregular Romantic drama] the less glaring improbability of the two."²³ The theory that an illusion of reality is maintained by the unities is rejected, the *Quarterly* denying that any deception is practised upon the audience. If, however, there were any illusion, it says, nothing could spoil it sooner than the absurdities produced by the unities. The stronger the illusion of reality, the sillier some of the actions seem, in view of the places in which they are awkwardly represented to occur.²⁴ The *Quarterly's* objections are mostly to the unities of place and time. It recognizes some sense in the unity of action, and it often recommends unity—in a general, nontechnical sense.²⁵

¹⁹ *Quarterly*, XVII, 257; XXVII, 488 f., 506.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, XVII, 448 f.; XXIX, 32, 421; XXXIV, 400.

²¹ *Ibid.*, X, 383; XXVII, 481-85. ²² *Ibid.*, XVII, 99; XXVII, 479-81.

²³ *Ibid.*, XXVII, 486; XXVIII, 106 ff.; XXIX, 40, 43, 49, 421.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, X, 383; XXV, 2; XXVII, 485-87; XXVIII, 107 f.; XXIX, 421.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, XI, 188; XIII, 307; XIV, 337; XVII, 98 f.; XIX, 345 f.; XXIV, 528; XXVI, 130.

The views I have summarized, persistently and emphatically repeated through many volumes, are evidence of a consistent and carefully thought-out policy. A thorough examination of every literary article in the first forty volumes of the *Quarterly* has failed to reveal anything that I feel can fairly be called a contradiction of these views. Those who insist that the *Quarterly* is authoritarian will find it a difficult task to explain away such passages as the following: "As the time has been when the solemn quackery of Bossu was received by many, even in England, as profound and solid criticism, we are anxious to prevent the risk of such cumbrous absurdity returning into power, by exposing the frothy foundation on which it stands, and the needless hindrances which it opposes to dramatic excellence."²⁶ And those who describe the *Quarterly's* criticism as a heritage of the eighteenth century might well consider the question, at what period was Bossu's work received in England as profound and solid?

The comments of the *Edinburgh Review* on the rules give a quite different impression. From time to time it certainly champions them. For example, in 1807 it hopes "that the lamentable consequences which have resulted from Mr Wordsworth's open violation of the established laws of poetry, will operate as a wholesome warning to those who might otherwise have been seduced by his example and be the means of restoring to that ancient and venerable code its due honor and authority."²⁷ Again, in a much later volume, it longs for the time when the poet deferred with the most implicit submission to the canons of criticism sanctioned by the best ages of antiquity, canons which, "founded as they are in sound sense and true philosophy, have therefore, and therefore only, received the approbation of ages."²⁸ Remarks of similar tendency appear now and then throughout our period.

But in spite of this marked inclination toward a codified criticism, doctrines of a contrary tendency are often to be found. These begin to appear in about 1811, and from then on there is a continual shifting back and forth. In 1811 we read that it is despotism in taste to try to make rules at first established (perhaps artificially) universal.²⁹ The reviewer is quoting Schlegel, but apparently with approval. In his own person, the reviewer says that a system founded on an exclusive admiration of the classics has produced the

²⁶ *Quarterly*, XXVII, 479.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, XXXV, 137 f.

²⁷ *Edinburgh*, XI, 231. Cf. I, 63.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, XXVI, 69.

barren rules of the schools and prejudices which still influence literature.³⁰ "To deduce authoritative rules from poems that have been written without rule, is plainly to derive an argument in favour of bondage, from the most splendid proofs of the benefits of freedom."³¹ "It is not very material . . .," he says, "that a poem should be built up according to rules, many of which originated in the caprice of former poets."³²

Such statements as these are in almost ludicrous contrast to the passages previously quoted, in defense of the rules. An explanation for the appearance of these new ideas in the *Edinburgh* from about 1811 on may perhaps be found in the *Quarterly's* hostility to the rules, which began to be emphasized at that time. It is likely that as a result of the *Quarterly's* vigorous assault, its rival was often frightened away from its original position.

The attitude of the *Edinburgh* toward the unities is generally contemptuous,³³ but not always. It once speaks quite bitterly of the ascendancy of the irregular drama. The critics who complain of the modern drama, the reviewer says, have only themselves to blame; when they ruled the theatre, they failed to encourage the regular drama. Johnson led on the dogs of war, and their cry was for liberty and nature, tragicomedy and Shakespeare. Johnson wrote against the unities in his preface to Shakespeare and condescended to insert Dennis's criticism of *Cato* in his life of Addison. "We now gather the fruits of his toil," the reviewer mourns. He will not go so far as Voltaire, who said that Shakespeare had spoiled our taste, but he will say that the defenders of Shakespeare's irregularities have not improved it.³⁴ This is certainly an unequivocal defense of the unities and an expression of contempt for Dennis's argument against them. But several years later the reviewer says that he has had considerable contempt for the unities ever since he read Dennis's criticism of *Cato* in his boyhood!³⁵

With regard to the theory that the audience at a play may be actually deceived to the extent of believing in the reality of the scene, the *Edinburgh* sometimes asserts the possibility of the illusion,³⁶ and sometimes denies it.³⁷

³⁰ *Edinburgh*, XXIX, 465. ³¹ *Ibid.*, XLII, 34.

³² *Ibid.*, XLII, 47.

³³ *Ibid.*, XX, 204; XXVI, 72 f., 90; XLVII, 16 f.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, IX, 205.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, XXXVI, 422 f. Cf. XLVII, 421 f.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, VII, 321 f.; XV, 272. ³⁷ *Ibid.*, XXXVI, 423; XLVII, 193, 422.

The Imitation of Models

A belief in the advantages to be derived from imitation is usually regarded as characteristic of the Classical system. Certainly the rise of Romanticism occasioned a new interest in the conflicting claims of imitation and originality. The Classical argument connects this question with the one just treated in the previous section. It was admitted that a writer should imitate nature; but the difficulty, it was said, was to know how. Fortunately for us, the writers of ancient times had worked out the only good way to do so. Consequently modern writers find that the easiest way to copy nature is to take advantage of the rules which have been discovered by the ancients, instead of going to the unnecessary trouble to work out the rules afresh. This whole argument is implicit in Pope's account of an imaginary rebellion of Virgil against the tyranny of the rules. Pope regards adherence to the rules as the best, if not the only, avenue to fidelity to nature, and he describes adherence to the rules in terms of the imitation of models.

Imitation is also linked with other questions disputed during the Romantic Period. A belief in imitation may arise from a conviction that modern writers are at a disadvantage in comparison with those of past ages. Some critics believed that the days of really great geniuses were over, and that the moderns could not possibly shine by depending upon originality; the only way in which good literature could still be produced was by following in the footsteps of past writers. Others said that the advantage of the ancients lay simply in having lived first; they explored all the possible modes of writing, so that no successor could expect to be original except by exploiting some method which had been tried and rejected as unsatisfactory. Critics who argue along such lines tend to assume either that there is an absolute standard of excellence, which it is our duty to try to discover and approximate, or that literature has fallen from a golden age, which it can now but faintly echo by imitation. The Romantics tend to hold that standards of excellence are national—or even personal—rather than permanent and universal. They also incline to a belief in perfectibility, which presupposes the inferiority of the past. It will be well to bear in mind the ways in which the problem of imitation is related to other current critical issues, for the attitudes of the reviews on this point are conditioned by their general critical philosophies.

The term "imitation" is used with reference to two quite different processes, but this fact need not cause any confusion here. We may observe at the outset that both reviews always approve of the imitation of nature³⁸ and always condemn a servile imitation of any author or work.³⁹ The reviews also always prefer the imitation of nature whenever a choice must be made between that and the imitation of models.⁴⁰

The reader must not expect either review to require or prohibit unconditionally the imitation of models. The problem which the reviewers face is much too complicated for them to reach so simple a decision as these. As we shall see, there are many ways of imitating models, from the borrowing of specific elements in a work to being influenced in a general way by the spirit of an author; and the reviewer may regard any of these kinds of imitation as intolerable, permissible, desirable, or imperative. He may also make his approval of any kind of imitation depend upon certain conditions. Therefore, we must seek, not a categorical condemnation or benediction, but a consistent tendency. We shall find that the *Quarterly* approves of studying past writings in order to gain any benefits from them that one can, but disapproves of any imitation which aims merely at an uncritical resemblance to the model. It has a low opinion of the gifts required to imitate, or to reproduce characteristic features. The *Edinburgh*, on the other hand, regarding past writings as superior, tends to consider it a praiseworthy achievement to catch the features of one's model, as long as one takes care to choose good models. It is not so much hostile to originality as suspicious of the ability of moderns to achieve anything valuable by the use of it.

The *Quarterly* frequently recommends the study of the writings of the past.⁴¹ Though it believes that a writer should be free to

³⁸ *Quarterly*, I, 402; XI, 453; XV, 84; XXI, 536. *Edinburgh*, XII, 66 f.; XVI, 32; XXV, 60; XXVI, 99; XXIX, 5 f.; XXXV, 179; XXXVI, 421; XXXVII, 223, 408.

³⁹ *Quarterly*, XI, 189; XII, 112; XV, 71; XVI, 119, 468; XVII, 228, 254; XIX, 216, 346; XXII, 304; XXIV, 557; XXV, 430; XXVII, 334; XXIX, 30, 32. *Edinburgh*, II, 254, 279, 282-84; VI, 317; VIII, 167, 329 f.; XXII, 35; XXVI, 94, 306; XXXVI, 417.

⁴⁰ *Quarterly*, I, 282; V, 42; VII, 194; XI, 499; XIII, 113; XVII, 257; XXIII, 166; XXIV, 72; XXIX, 37, 53; XXX, 49. *Edinburgh*, II, 81, 186; XVI, 214; XXI, 26; XXXVII, 208, 223; XXXIX, 393.

⁴¹ *Quarterly*, IX, 160, 212; X, 141; XI, 178; XV, 84; XIX, 346 f.; XXIII, 225; XXV, 436.

exercise his own judgment, without being bound to the rules of the past, it thinks that he would be unwise to deprive himself of the benefits to be gained from the experience of his predecessors. The only way in which literature can advance is by our taking advantage of what past writers have learned. One should, therefore, read the older writings to broaden one's mind, to learn other forms of writing than those currently fashionable, to elevate the mind, and to become acquainted with the great geniuses who have expressed themselves in literature. Not the least of the reasons for studying the older writings is to learn to avoid their mistakes. In such a program there is very little that can fairly be called imitation. The *Quarterly* takes the moderate position of recognizing that values are to be found in the models of the past, but it does not view them as the realization of an ideal. The purpose is not merely to approach the superior excellence of ancient works, but to gain from them what help one can to surpass them. The *Quarterly* advises emulating the spirit of great writers. But in very few respects—chiefly matters of execution and detail—does it recommend any real imitation, and it continually warns the writer that the changes in literature and civilization must be taken into consideration in imitating works of the past. Its praise is for the authors who have "enriched themselves with the spoils, without encumbering themselves with the trammels of antiquity."⁴²

One kind of imitation, the borrowing of specific incidents, characters, passages, etc., requires separate mention. The *Quarterly* is willing to look indulgently upon a work containing elements which can be traced to literary sources, if the writer is indebted merely for suggestions and if he has transformed what he has borrowed, using the hints as material for a new process of creation.⁴³ In that case, the writer gives his materials the stamp of his own individuality, and he is no more to blame than if he had obtained them from life. But the *Quarterly* is severe upon the copyist, who is content to seize on a good thing wherever he finds it and to use it just as it was first used.⁴⁴

The general attitude of the *Quarterly* toward imitation of models is that it is a beneficial practice if pursued with good judgment.

⁴² *Quarterly*, XXIII, 225. Cf. V, 43; XII, 112.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, XXI, 525, 530 f., 549; XXXIII, 489.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, XII, 507 f.; XIX, 334 f., 346; XXII, 403; XXIII, 166; XXVI, 470.

but that it is dangerous if one aims at the highest excellence. The reviewer admits that deliberate imitation requires considerable talents, but insists that the product is of a very low order of merit. The best statement of this thought is to be found in a comment on a nonliterary art: Canova, in his passion to imitate ancient art,

was obliged to forget his native country and all the emotions which home and kindred excite—in short, to think for a remote age and a strange people. He was compelled to surrender himself as far as he could to Greece, feel with other men's hearts, see through Athenian eyes, make judgment an alien, and wean his affections from all that he naturally loved. All this required some fortitude, a little bad taste, and—after all—it perhaps could only be accomplished by a second rate spirit.⁴⁵

This distaste for the arts of imitation shows through most of the *Quarterly's* comments. Emphasis is continually placed on the two main arguments: The works of the past are not so superior that we should resign ourselves to trying to duplicate them, and a good copy is of little worth for the very reason that it is only a copy. When the *Quarterly* lists the points upon which a poem should be criticised, it does not even mention among them the degree to which the poem approximates some recognized model.⁴⁶ Far from advising imitation of models as an avenue to imitation of nature, the *Quarterly* often seems to regard imitation of models as almost tantamount to departure from nature.

Turning to the *Edinburgh*, we find it in substantial agreement with the *Quarterly* on some points. It recommends the study of great works of the past for the intellectual excitement and stimulation which one can obtain from them.⁴⁷ It requires the borrower either to make his material his own by redigesting it or else to catch the spirit as well as the form of his original.⁴⁸ It says that one cannot produce by imitation the characteristics which are most essential to give a work greatness,⁴⁹ but that the process may be used to develop some of the less fundamental excellences,—it can improve one's taste, increase polish and elegance in composition, help one to avoid extravagance and crudities, acquaint one with

⁴⁵ *Quarterly*, XXXIV, 115. Cf. XXIII, 166.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, XIX, 329.

⁴⁷ *Edinburgh*, XXVI, 69; XXVII, 278.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 257, 259; XXIX, 34; XL, 408.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 29; XX, 204; XXXIII, 145; XXXVI, 417; XLV, 277.

many modes of writing, give one new ideas, teach one the style and diction of literature, etc.⁵⁰

From the more controversial passages, one gains the distinct impression that the *Edinburgh* admires the art of imitation far more than the *Quarterly* does. In its many recommendations of the practice,⁵¹ it goes too far and speaks too emphatically to allow us to explain them away. We notice the statement that original genius is visible in imitation, as well as in creation, and also the doctrine that "a good imitation of what is excellent, is generally preferable to original mediocrity."⁵² The *Edinburgh* evidently begins with the assumption that there is an absolute excellence, which it is the writer's duty to approach as nearly as possible, no matter how he gets there. This assumption is one important source of difference between the reviews. It lies behind the *Edinburgh's* reluctance to abandon the rules, which delimit a traditional conception of ideal excellence. Believing that this excellence is permanent, universal, and ascertainable, the *Edinburgh* concludes that, insofar as it has been attained by past authors, a modern has no choice but to imitate them if he wishes to approach perfection.

These views are discernible through most of the comments on imitation. Even the *Edinburgh's* recommendations of the imitation of nature in preference to that of models are not very satisfactory or entirely conclusive. Thus when the reviewer criticizes the motivation of the characters in a certain novel, by saying that the book shows more study of romances than of the heart,⁵³ one feels that the contrast between nature and models is more in the words than in the thoughts of the critic, and that what he means primarily is that the writer chose bad models. There is often an undertone of irony which makes it plain that the reviewer's real motive is to cast reflections upon the modern tendency to abandon the imitation of models. For example, he says that Cowper passed from the imitation of poets to the imitation of nature, and when

⁵⁰ *Edinburgh*, I, 309; II, 81 f., 92-94; IV, 338; VI, 1 f.; XI, 218; XV, 42; XXII, 218 f.; XXVI, 305; XXVIII, 84; XXXVI, 83; XXXVII, 421; XLVI, 270.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, XV, 42; XXIX, 33 f.; XXXVI, 82-84, 513; XXXVII, 417; XL, 457.

⁵² *Ibid.*, XXXIII, 144.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, II, 186. The novel is *Charles et Marie*, by the Comtesse Flahaut, Marqueza do Sousa Botelho Mourão e Vasconcellos.

he describes the beneficial results of this new method, he seems to be speaking rather seriously. But when he goes on to say that, disdainful to follow others, Cowper often lost his way and rushed into extremes opposite to those he wished to avoid, and when the reviewer proceeds to a severe and detailed criticism of the most Romantic features of Cowper's poetry, then the reader realizes that the first comments were only concessive and that the reviewer's primary motive is to depreciate Cowper and to cast reflections on his methods.⁵⁴ In interpreting the *Edinburgh's* doctrine, it is necessary always to be on guard, for the tone so often belies the words. Its Romantic dicta especially are often uttered with such obvious distaste that they are evidently calculated to have an effect opposite to the one at which they seem to be aimed. The *Edinburgh* often gives the impression of having deserted to the Romantics only for the purpose of betraying them.

One comment which greatly illuminates the philosophy of the *Edinburgh* is this: "If a descriptive poet makes us feel distinctly that he is copying from nature, and not from his predecessors, we excuse a good deal of coincidence" with other poems.⁵⁵ It is evident that this principle is capable of very broad application, and that it could excuse any amount of imitation on the score of inevitable coincidence. Implicit in this statement is the belief that one can hardly copy nature without repeating other writers. This is a second source of disagreement between the quarterlies, the *Edinburgh* contending that men have been writing so long that they have pretty well covered all the available aspects of nature, so that to copy nature is to copy past writers. In these latter days of the world, we are told, the only way to be original is to depart from nature.⁵⁶ Such a dogma as this leads inevitably to the depreciation of originality and persuades the critic to retreat to imitation, as the only method of attaining excellence which remains to the hapless moderns.⁵⁷ To the *Edinburgh*, literary perfection is a fairly definite thing, capable of being enclosed within the orbit of a practically immutable set of rules. It is corollary to such a view that limitations are imposed upon literary production, and that it must come to a halt when all possible masterpieces have been composed. When one also believes in a golden age of literature, set vaguely in

⁵⁴ *Edinburgh*, II, 81 f.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, VIII, 465 f.; XXXVIII, 352.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, XVI, 214.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, XLVII, 13.

the remote past, and laments that he has fallen upon evil days, he can hardly imagine the possibility of the moderns' producing anything through originality. Nothing remains for them but to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors. The only answer to pessimism such as that of the *Edinburgh* is the *Quarterly's* doctrine—that excellence is not fixed but changing, and that the ancients were unable because of the deficiencies of their civilization to attain perfection.

The Labor of Correction

Excessive fastidiousness in details of execution is a generally recognized characteristic of Classical composition. Correctness implies—in some degree—correction, the great authority for which is Horace. Now, it is obvious by definition that any fault which can be corrected should be, but the question of whether or not to revise, and how much to revise, cannot be answered so simply. There is no serious support in the Romantic Period for the doctrine that a writer should never reread what he has written. There is a tendency, however, to recede from the extreme position of Horace, who recommended nine years for the piece to cool off. The contribution of the Romantic Movement to the controversy is its resistance to the idolatry of mere faultlessness and the emphasis which it places upon the superiority of the creative to the corrective talents.

In this dispute, as in others, the *Quarterly* espouses the cause of the Romantics. As early as its second number it finds the opportunity to launch its attack upon the venerable doctrine of the duty of careful revision. No better opportunity could have been found than that offered by the publication of the *Gertrude of Wyoming* of the cautious and laborious Campbell. The reviewer settles himself to the task with obvious relish and draws up a deliberate, thorough, and closely reasoned brief against the practice of patient revision. After observing that it is impossible to make numerous and minute alterations without leaving traces of the original order and, as a result, involving the expression in an almost inextricable tangle, the critic proceeds:

Lastly, and above all, in the irksome task of repeated revision and reconsideration, the poet loses, if we may use the phrase, the impulse of inspiration; his fancy, at first so ardent, becomes palled and flattened, and no longer excites a correspondent glow of expression. In this state of mind he may correct faults, but he will never add beauties; and so much do we

prefer the stamp of originality to tame correctness, that were there not a medium which ought to be aimed at, we would rather take the *prima cura* with all its errors and with all its beauties, than the overamended edition in which both are obliterated. . . . Then occur the doubtful and damping questions, whether the faded inspiration was genuine, whether the verses corresponded in any degree to its dictates, or have power to communicate to others a portion of the impulse which produced them. Then comes the dread of malignant criticism; and last, but not least tormenting, the advice of literary friends, each suggesting doubts and alterations, till the spirit is corrected out of the poem, as a sprightly boy is sometimes lectured and flogged for venial indiscretions into a stupid and inanimate dunce.⁵⁸

Several years later the reviewer repeats his argument, quoting himself (apparently unconsciously): "It has been justly observed, that much of the original spirit of a picture or a poem is apt to evaporate in the process of subsequent correction, and that high finishing and minute accuracy are too frequently purchased by some diminution in the vigour, and if we may use the expression, the vehemence of the piece."⁵⁹ The same thought continues to be emphasized from year to year.⁶⁰

The *Quarterly* sometimes concedes that careful correction has an educative value and that it is proper when one is beginning a literary career, but contends that one should be able to drop it after gaining a little experience.⁶¹ The reviewer still insists on the inferiority of revision to creation. He distinguishes between the poets of art and those of nature, those of determination and those of impulse; the former, he says, are materialistic, antispiritual, deliberate; they stress labor and correction, and they aim at perfection.⁶²

From time to time the *Quarterly* amplifies its argument against correction by bringing forward various new objections to the practice. We are told that Gray's "obstinate exactness in elaborating every line as he proceeded, prevented him from undertaking" any extended work.⁶³ The reviewer also disapproves of revision of a work many years after it was written, because one cannot retain the inspiration or the sympathy with the original feeling which is

⁵⁸ *Quarterly*, I, 255-57.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, V, 367.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, VII, 395; XVI, 178-80.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, I, 255; XVI, 178 f.; XXXI, 343.

⁶² *Ibid.*, XXXV, 204. Cf. XXXI, 342 f.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, XI, 311. Cf. XVI, 179; XXXI, 288 f.; XXXV, 215.

necessary if one is to revise properly. "In this minute criticism there is danger of altering for the sake of alteration; of preferring the substituted reading, merely because it is new; and injuring the passage, by making such substitutions when the feeling with which it was originally composed has past [*sic*] away."⁶⁴ One of the most important points is that correction is especially damaging to the higher kinds of literature and to the more sublime beauties:

Poetry being, in its higher classes, an art which has for its elements sublimity and unaffected beauty, is more liable than any other to suffer from the labour of polishing, or from the elaborate and composite style of ornament, and alternate affectation of simplicity, and artifice, which characterize the works, even of the first poets, when they have been over-anxious to secure public applause, by long and reiterated correction. It must be remembered that we speak of the higher tones of composition; there are others of a subordinate character, where extreme art and labour are not bestowed in vain.⁶⁵

From the quotations I have given, the *Quarterly's* hostility to the ideal of correctness must be evident, I think. However, it professes to recognize "a m dium which ought to be aimed at," and therefore we need not be surprised to find it occasionally warning an author against too much carelessness. The *Quarterly* expresses the common feeling that to publish too hastily shows insufficient respect for the public. It recognizes that there is a certain art in correction, and it credits various writers with being able to conceal such pains as they take and to give an air of ease and spontaneity which belies the labor they expend. In some cases the reviewer approves of the practice of writing in haste and revising at leisure. There are many passages which give limited approval to correction,⁶⁶ but I cannot consider them really contradictory to those which I have quoted against laborious revision. On the contrary, I think that the *Quarterly* deserves the credit for demolishing the old doctrine. Of course the Romantics had already abandoned the worship of Classical correctness, but they were still censured by some critics for having done so; and until rescued by the *Quarterly*, they had no very good defense.

⁶⁴ *Quarterly*, XXXV, 214 f. Cf. XXXI, 288 f.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, XVI, 179 f. Cf. XXII, 157.

⁶⁶ *Quarterly*, I, 255-57; II, 388; IV, 517; VII, 374; VIII, 505 f.; IX, 211 f.; XI, 318; XII, 167; XIII, 288; XXI, 540 f.; XXII, 157; XXIII, 430; XXIV, 543, 545; XXVI, 148; XXXIII, 592; XXXIV, 5.

The *Edinburgh* exhibits no distinct difference in attitude but some difference in emphasis. It makes no attempt, as does the *Quarterly*, to work out a formal and complete argument against correctness. There are frequent signs of sympathy with the old ideal. But along with these are many comments of similar tendency to that of the passages quoted from the *Quarterly*. While it is difficult to make much distinction between the quarterlies on this point, the reader may feel inclined to attribute some reluctance to the *Edinburgh* in its attack on correction.

In the first few volumes of the *Edinburgh* I find little opposition to correction. It is true that the review attributes a positive advantage to incorrectness in observing that a little roughness or harshness of expression now and then may contribute to the effect of strength in a work and is characteristic of great genius.⁶⁷ The *Edinburgh* sets a higher value on creative genius than on industry in correction.⁶⁸ It grants that general merits may in some measure compensate for partial inaccuracy in taste and expression.⁶⁹ The criticism of *Gertrude of Wyoming* may well be compared with that in the *Quarterly*. The *Edinburgh* finds that the greatest fault in the poem is an occasional constraint and obscurity of diction, which seems to be due to "too laborious an effort at emphasis or condensation. The metal seems in several places to have been so much overworked, as to have lost not only its ductility, but its lustre." Some passages in the poem are very obscure, and some "so elaborate and artificial, as to destroy all appearance of nature in the sentiment." The natural force and boldness of Campbell's ideas are "habitually checked by a certain fastidious timidity, and an anxiety about the minor graces of correct and chastened composition."⁷⁰ This is not like the thoroughgoing and analytic argument in the first volume of the *Quarterly*, but it takes the same position. These are the only comments of any significance that I have found in the *Edinburgh* during the seven years preceding the review of Campbell in the first volume of the *Quarterly*.

After the *Quarterly*'s declaration, however, the *Edinburgh* takes a stronger tone and also repeats some of the arguments of its rival. It declares that the pleasure afforded by a poem usually has no proportion to the pains taken with it.⁷¹ As it doubts whether much

⁶⁷ *Edinburgh*, II, 246.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, III, 29.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, IV, 303.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, XIV, 16, 19.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, XXVI, 458.

greater pains would enable Scott to write much better poetry, it would rather have two beautiful poems with the present proportion of faults than one with only one-tenth as many faults.⁷² This remark shows a tendency to place a higher value on the presence of beauties than on the absence of faults. A stronger indication of the same inclination is observable in the statement that "the sober and anxious frame of mind . . . produced by eschewing little faults, and labouring after petty graces, is quite incompatible with the raised imagination which gives birth to the grander beauties of poetry."⁷³ But probably the most daring of the *Edinburgh's* remarks in this connection is that Scott "was utterly careless of the reproach of small imperfections, disdained the inglorious labour of perpetual correctness, and has *consequently* imparted to his productions that spirit and ease and variety, which reminds us of better times, and gives lustre and effect to those rich and resplendent passages to which it left him free to aspire."⁷⁴ The reviewer returns to the subject a little later with the statement that

those who are in the habit of attending to the smallest things, do not see the farthest before them; and, in polishing and correcting one line, they overlook or fall into some fresh mistake in another. The altering and retouching, after a lapse of time, or during the probation of Horace's 'nine years,' is sure to lead to inconsistency and partial oversights.⁷⁵

The comments just presented are very Romantic in tone, but the many others which tend in an opposite direction incline me to suspect that the *Edinburgh* was often driven into its attacks on correction by the influence of the *Quarterly*. Certainly the former review is often very emphatic in its espousal of correctness. It denies that careful revision need rob a work of an air of ease.⁷⁶ It censures at great length the current indifference to perfection of execution, treats negligence in poetry very seriously, and attacks the "cox-combical pedantry in a certain tribe of writers [probably the Lake School], which has led them to despise the artificial beauties resulting from accuracy of finish, as below the aims of original genius."⁷⁷ Over a period of several years the reviewer drags out and dusts off all the old stories about laborious writers of the past, presumably

⁷² *Edinburgh*, XVI, 293.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, XXXVI, 419.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, XX, 203.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, XL, 86.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, XI, 412 f.; XXIX, 467; XXXIV, 307.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, XXXV, 136.

for the admonishment of the writers of the present: he tells us that Petrarch, Casa, Bembo, and others often worked months on one sonnet, and that Bembo passed each sonnet through forty steps of correction;⁷⁸ that Virgil wanted the *Æneid* to be burned because he had not had a chance to give it its last polish;⁷⁹ that Plato continued to the age of eighty correcting the language of his dialogues, that he left a manuscript of the *Republic* in which the opening words were written several times in various arrangements, and that Demosthenes was continually reworking his orations;⁸⁰ that Isocrates spent fifteen years on one oration;⁸¹ that Ariosto is said to have written the first stanza of the *Orlando* ten or twelve times.⁸² This is certainly not the language of a confirmed enemy to correctness. Horace, with his paltry nine years, was as nothing beside this critic! Of the many other comments in defense of revision,⁸³ I think it no more than fair to say that they are comparatively downright in their attitude and seem rather in contrast to most of the teachings of the *Quarterly*.

The attitude which seems to me most typical of the *Edinburgh* and most in line with its other opinions is both pessimistic and anxious. Even when it recognizes correctness as one of the lesser glories of literature, it flies to it as a refuge. Convinced that in these degenerate days it is impossible to revive the spirit of the old English literature, it pleads with the writers to snatch the last honor remaining and to "add the last polish and fine finish to the modern Belles Lettres."⁸⁴ The *Edinburgh* reviewer, looking about him at the herd of bad poets and bad critics, all eager to take advantage of the authority of any great writer who may yield to the temptation of writing too hastily and too much, calls upon all "men of taste and genius to make their last stand" and try to stem the tide of incorrectness.⁸⁵ He looks back with a kind of nostalgia to the days when writings were severely criticized and the writer polished and repolished in anticipation of this critical scrutiny.

⁷⁸ *Edinburgh*., VI, 297.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, XV, 326.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, XXXVI, 85.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 513 n.

⁸² *Ibid.*, XLV, 6.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, V, 80; VI, 19 f.; XXIV, 400 f., 411; XXXV, 135-38; XLI, 287; XLV, 4-6, 9.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, XXXVIII, 356 f.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, XV, 326.

Within the limits of a short article it is impossible to make a complete case for the Romanticism of the reviews, but the evidence which I have been able to present should be sufficient to postpone further dogmatic statements of their supposed Classicism. Actual reading of the reviews has convinced me that the responsibility for the triumph of the Romantic Movement lies quite as much with the *Quarterly Review* as with the Romantic authors themselves. I have shown that the *Edinburgh* rather timidly and reluctantly follows the lead of its rival but finds it somewhat difficult to reconcile liberal doctrine with its own fundamentally Classical philosophy. I have confined myself strictly to doctrinal issues and have disregarded the reviewers' comments on personalities. Exclusive attention to the latter can only blind one to the fact that the ultimate effect of the quarterly criticism was to promote the Romantic cause. I have also avoided the obscure question of the authorship of individual articles. My concern has been with the total effect of each periodical. The mere fact that the reviews—the *Quarterly*, at any rate—have proved susceptible of such treatment and have shown strong consistency throughout is, I think, in itself a matter of importance.

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